

309 Yoakum Pkwy #601
Alexandria, VA 22304
May 18, 1986

Dear Mom and Dad,

This is my second try at a writing a letter today. Earlier I had written over a page and the computer turned off. I think it got too warm as we had the sliding doors open and the temperature was in the high 80's. Now I will try again. I enjoyed your letter and was interested in Nellie's participation in ElderHostel about which I have read several articles. For those whose birthdates are sufficiently far in the past, the program offers a week or two of instruction in one of a wide variety of subjects. It is worldwide and generally at a University where the participants can stay in the dormitory. It sounds pretty good and perhaps I will try it some day. We both enjoyed Mary's letter on Jungian types. Her analysis of me was right on track except for one minor mistake which somehow crept in. Surely the description,

"May sometimes be more positive and confident than
their experience in an area warrants."

is inappropriate for me although I can certainly see it applied to Dad and Mike.

Our trip to Britain was a wonderful break from work and my "reward" for finishing classes. We departed from National on Friday afternoon and arrived at Heathrow 6am Saturday morning. After picking up the rental car and having a short nap at our airport hotel, we drove into town near where we used to live. Then we walked down to the theatre district and happened to pass

by "Les Miserables" just as the Saturday matinee was about to begin. This is the hit of the season and is coming to Washington in December. I believe we got the last two seats and were very pleased to see the play. It is a musical along the lines of Nicolas Nickleby. The play ended just as the pubs were opening and a pint of bitter was very welcome. Afterward we went to a nearby Italian restaurant and then drove back to our hotel.

Sunday morning we arose early and went jogging as we managed to do every morning. The weather was windy, cool, and threatening showers. This was typical for the trip although we were rained upon only once or twice and most days were mainly sunny. It was cool enough to wear sweaters and coats. We drove toward the West by Oxford and through Cheltenham to our first stop in the town of Hereford. The Blue Guide directed us to the "Old House" of 1621 and to the 11th C. cathedral. It started to shower and we retreated to a pub. On Sunday all pubs open at noon, close at 2pm, and then reopen at 7pm. We liked seeing all the local people come into the pub and greet their acquaintances as they apparently do every Sunday (after church I suppose). From Hereford we drove north to the town of Ludlow in which Broad Street, "ranks with the finest old streets in England." because of its half-timbered houses constructed of beams alternating with layers of plaster. Many of them date from the 1600's. We toured the castle where Prince Arthur, Henry VIII's brother, died one year after marrying Catherine of Aragon. Then we took cream tea (scones with jam and clotted cream) in the ancient Feathers Hotel. Going north we stopped to see Stokesay Castle, the oldest

and probably the finest example in England of a moated and fortified manor-house." Eventually we reached Chester and Blossoms Hotel which was our home for the next four days. It was a very nice hotel right in the center of town. We generally ate dinner in the hotel because outside of the large cities there are few restaurants available.

Monday was our day to tour Chester and we started by walking all the way around the medieval town walls (two miles). Chester is noted for its Roman ruins and many other ancient buildings and sites which have been better preserved than anywhere else in Britain. After being on our feet for about eight hours we still were able to walk through the town gardens near the river. The afternoon was sunny and many people were enjoyed their "Bank Holiday" (May Day) by viewing the spring flowers.

Tuesday was a long day. We got up as usual at 6am and after breakfast drove west into Wales along the main road just south of the coast road. We proceeded all the way to the west coast of Wales and the town of Caernarvon which is named for its castle which encompasses three acres. It was built by Edward II in the 1200's. The walls are very thick such that passage ways and stairs to the towers are built inside them. One can clambor all over and get a good idea as to how these castles were constructed. Next we drove up the coast and over a bridge to the island of Anglesey where we stopped first at Beaumaris Castle. It is much smaller than Caernarvon, but very complete and standing in a picturesque (and strategic) point of land. South of the bridge is Plas Newydd, an 18th C. mansion looking out over the Menai Strait. It is one of several properties maintained by the

National Trust. They have been turned over to the government because of the 80 percent inheritance tax in Britain. These houses are incredible museums of furniture, art, and decoration not to mention the gardens. Many of them have small placards stating that a particular item is on loan to the National Gallery in Washington D.C. This, of course, was the Treasure Houses of Britain exhibit which closed last month. Now we weren't through yet because we hurried back to the coastal town of Conwy where we saw Plas Mawr, an Elizabethan house built 1577-80, and yet another impressive castle. Finally, we drove out to the resort town of Llandudno and found a place to eat dinner.

Wednesday we drove south through Wrexham to Llangollen to Valle Crucis Abbey established in 1201. It is now a ruin but an interesting sight in the fields near a river. We like to identify the different forms of architecture and the familiar buildings which used to be the center of local life. Further south is Oswestry which was having its weekly market the day we visited. The town was crowded with shoppers looking over the stalls of displayed goods. We had tea in a little shop and climbed the hill where the castle used to stand. Nearby was Llwyd Mansion of 1604. Outside of town was Old Oswestry, a large hill with ditches and banks. It was occupied by Britains from 300 B.C. until the Romans arrived in 75 A.D. Continuing a little past Welshpool we reached Powis Castle, inhabited for 500 years after its establishment in the 13th C. The later inhabitants had transformed it into another great house with all the appropriate luxurious furnishings. Turning back and heading north we reached Chirk Castle, another

great mansion derived from a castle. It is in the shape of a square with bastions at every corner and half-bastions at the center of each face. It was most interesting for the reconstructed servant's quarters and other rooms which aren't generally seen. Finally we made it to Erddig, one of the National Trust's "more important properties." It is a late 17 C. mansion of great size and very completely furnished as it was 100 years ago.

Thursday was spent in Shrewsbury. The town walk took us by a mansion of 1592 and other old houses to the high point where Harry Hotspur, featured in Shakespeare's Henry IV, was hanged, drawn, and quartered in 1403. The town museum has many exhibits of local Roman ruins and an excellent display of medieval artifacts turned up during building projects. We had a beer in the Lion Hotel which dates mainly from 1770 and has accomodated many celebrities including Charles Dickens. Below the Lion Hotel is a half-timbered house in which Henry Tudor lodged in 1485 on his way to victory and the crown (as Henry VII) at Bosworth Field. Close to Shrewsbury was another ruined abbey and the old Roman town of Viroconium which is still being excavated.

The next day was Friday and time to leave Chester. We drove east through Macclesfield (the Close Family ancestral seat) to the pleasant resort of Buxton in the Derbyshire Peak district. We couldn't see the mountains for the fog, however. Haddon Hall, "the most attractive and most thoroughly preserved of medieval houses," was an impressive and beautiful sight. More like a castle than a house, it sits on a hill near a river which has been diverted to form a moat. When Queen Victoria visited, it was

the first time she was allowed to eat with the grownups. Next was Chatsworth House, the "Palace of the Peak", a vast mansion of the Duke of Devonshire. A truly immense house, larger than most museums, it is literally crammed with precious works of art. The park and gardens are highly recommended, but we didn't have time this trip and returned to Heathrow via the M1 motorway. We dropped off the rental car and took the AirBus to our hotel, the London Elizabeth at Lancaster Gate across the street from Hyde Park.

Saturday we started off walking again and reached the museum area where Vickie went into the National Gallery and I visited the National Portrait Gallery for about an hour. We ate lunch in an Italian cafeteria and then walked across the Thames to the National Theatre complex where we saw a matinee performance of Shaw's "Mrs. Warren's Profession". Then we walked back to Covent Garden where we browsed in the bookstore and visited the pub before going to the London Coliseum for "Die Fledermaus" by the English National Opera. The opera, by Johann Strauss, was very light in the Viennese style and similar to "The Merry Widow".

Sunday we got a good start by taking the tube to Richmond and walk along the banks of the Thames to Ham House which you can read about in the brochure. We spent quite a while there enjoying good weather before returning to London by bus. That evening we walked across Hyde Park to Kensington and the Bombay Brasserie which Vickie had read about in a review a few weeks ago. Vickie had Tandoori (roasted) trout while I had quail stuffed with a mixture of rice and lamb. There were other good accompaniments

and delicious sorbets (mango, mint, and chocolate) for dessert.

Monday we made our way to the British Museum and attended a lecture on illuminated manuscripts in the library. Further down the street is the Public Records Office which was exhibiting a large quantity of material related to the Domesday Book (in your package). We had lunch at a new branch of our old vegetarian restaurant, Crank's, and later had dinner in another Italian restaurant.

Tuesday we selected another National Trust house to see, this one in the nearby suburb of Hampstead which has been the home of many artists and even Carl Marx. Fenton House, "a gracious mansion of 1693," was filled with 18th C. porcelain from many different factories. Afterward we returned to the British Museum for a lecture on certain Egyptian pharoahs. I was done in and returned to the hotel and a hot bath while Vickie still had the energy to visit the National Gallery again. That evening we walked down to Queensway and enjoyed a farewell dinner at one of the good Greek restaurants on a side street. The next day, completely satisfied but travel weary, we returned home.

Love,